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INDIA'S ANSWER TO THE CHINESE BOMB

by M. R. Masani

WHAT is the choice for this country faced with the Chinese atomic explosion?

As I can see it—and speak dispassionately—we have three possible alternatives open to us. The first is that we appeal to the United Nations and world opinion, and thus force the Chinese Communists to abandon their nuclear weapons. That, as I understand, has been the attitude of the Foreign Minister Sardar Swaran Singh. Frankly, I would call it a policy of sitting pretty. In all seriousness, in 1964, to expect world opinion to stop Mao Tse-tung from going his own way is to mistake illusion for reality. The Chinese Communist dictatorship has shown that they care two hoots for world opinion. They attacked Tibet in 1959 and again in 1960; they attacked India in 1962. Is not every act of theirs a flouting of world opinion? Did they not show what they thought of world opinion when they ignored Khrushchev's appeal to sign the anti-nuclear test ban treaty? Therefore, to count on world opinion to protect us from the Chinese nuclear attack is to expose the people of the whole of Northern India to destruction. I would like to warn that if we rely on world opinion in order to defend Delhi and the cities of northern India and the industrial belt of Bengal and Bihar by depending on world opinion, we will find it a very brittle weapon indeed.

Dangerous Assumption

There are official spokesmen who say, as Shrimati Indira Gandhi said on November 11 last. "If there is a nuclear war, everyone is in it. It makes no difference whether India has the atom bomb or not It has to be a world war." This is, again, another fallacy. A country that chooses to keep isolated and non-aligned, a country that has no allies and friends, has no right to expect that if one atom bomb is dropped on its territory, the whole world is going to endanger its own existence. This assumption of Shrimati Gandhi is very dangerous, though it appears a very comforting one. There is nothing automatic about a nuclear attack of any kind becoming immediately a world war. Supposing it did, supposing an attack that obliterated New Delhi or the whole of Bihar and Bengal with the industrial complex situated at Jamshedpur, Durgapur and all the rest of it were to be followed by American bombing of Peking, is this the highest objective of our policy? What we are aiming at is to see that a bomb is not dropped on us. The objective of our nuclear policy should not be retaliation but deterrence.

Then there is another argument, that there is the policy of non-violence for us to consider. I think we need not spend too much time on it because only recently Prime Minister Shastri talked about strengthening our armed forces and Shri Chavan was in London trying to get more arms. Let us not talk about non-violence in this context. A conventional weapon is as violent as a nuclear one. It is a matter of degree, not one of principle. Therefore, this issue of non-violence is completely irrelevant to this discussion.

Finally, there is an argument that "we are not frightened." Our Prime Minister has indicated that in one or two of his remarks. I wish it were true. I wish we could put our hands on our hearts here and say that none of us care if all of us are obliterated by nuclear bombs, all our dear and near ones and everything that we stand for—our way of life, our civilisation, culture and everything—were to be destroyed. Being normal human beings we are very much frightened that millions of our people can be obliterated by a bomb dropped by people in Peking, who have shown the most callous disregard for everyone else's happiness, security and well-being.

I wish I could agree with the Prime Minister that it is "childish", as he called it, for the leaders in Peking to think that they could frighten and spread their influence in Asia by nuclear strength. Unfortunately, I think, they are quite right, that people in Asia, as elsewhere, are frightened of mass collective destruction. There is nothing to be ashamed of in wanting our people and our country to survive happily and freely. There is nothing to be ashamed of in being frightened at millions of human beings being destroyed. It is not they who are childish.

It is not without significance in this context that the policy of doing nothing and appealing to world opinion is also the policy that is accepted by both wings of the Communist Party in India—the Moscow Wing and the Peking Wing. Surely, that support coming from these two quarters and their affiliation with Peking and Moscow should make us consider whether we as nationalists can chime in with that line. That line leads to conceding hegemony to communist China in Asia, to our sinking gradually into a satellite status of either Moscow or Peking. It would amount, if pursued—I hope it will be abandoned under the pressure of public opinion and Parliament—to the abandonment of the Union Government's very first duty to defend the country's frontiers, its sovereignty and its people.

An Indian Bomb?

That brings us to the second alternative that is before us, and that is to make the bomb or, as somebody has quite described it, "to keep up with the Joneses across the Himalayas".

First of all, what would be the purpose of making the atom bomb? We should be clear about that. I find a great amount of confusion about it. Would the objective to make atom bomb be to retaliate? Would it be to drop a bomb on Peking after Delhi is destroyed? No, that would not be the objective; the objective would be to have a deterrent. It would be to stop the Chinese from dropping a bomb on us.

If that is so, let us consider whether it is feasible for us to undertake it. Can we afford the cost? An American expert, Christopher Hohenhemser, estimates that the cost of capital investment on a military-

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significant nuclear programme for us would be Rs. 25 crores with an annual operation cost of Rs. 10 crores. The US Atomic Energy Commission has given another estimate—I do not know which is right—that we can establish enough plutonium production to manufacture one crude bomb at a cost of Rs. 25 crores. Then somebody else has estimated that the cost of establishing a diffusion plant for the separation of uranium-235 involves a capital cost of Rs. 500 crores and an equal amount (Rs. 500 crores) for running the plant, which means Rs. 1,000 crores.

The other day the French Cabinet accepted a defence budget, largely for nuclear purposes, because, as we know, they are trying to go forward with making their own bomb. That budget runs to 16,000 million francs or, let us say, roughly Rs. 1,600 crores for the coming year plus an equal amount on the air arm for developing the "Mirage-4" so that the bomb could be delivered to its target. These two total Rs. 3,200 crores for one year for France, about three-quarters of the entire outlay of our proposed Fourth Plan per year.

Then, the cost of the bomb is not the only thing; the cost of delivery is as expensive, as the French budget points out. The vital Chinese targets are 2,500 miles away, targets like Peking, Shanghai and the Manchurian industrial complex, comparable to our Bihar-Bengal-Orissa industrial complex, or even farther. We would, therefore, require an entire supersonic jet air force to deliver the bomb, to make it a real deterrent. On the other hand, our own targets like Delhi, U.P., Bihar and Bengal are only 300 miles away from the Chinese communist bases in Tibet. So, any old conventional bomber which gets through our lines of defence can drop the bomb and blow up millions of people. As the atomic race develops, we can imagine what astronomical figures such budgets would involve us in and what would be their effect on our economy.

Chen Yi's Parable

Marshal Chen Yi boasted that the Chinese must have their atom bomb even if they had to go without pants. In the brutal, heartless dictatorship over the Chinese people such as he exercises, he might get away with it. But can any democratic government whatever the party, hope to survive in democracy if it asks the people to do without food and clothing so that the wretched bomb may be made? We certainly cannot follow Marshal Chen Yi's parable.

What would be the consequence? The controversy over heavy industries, agriculture and consumer goods would immediately come to an end, because we would have no money either for agriculture or consumer goods or heavy industries! All schemes of development under the Fourth Plan would have to be scrapped because three-fourths of the Plan would be consumed by defence. All the projects will be starved impartially so that the nuclear monster may be fed. Famine and misery would stalk the land and the people would revolt.

And, who would be the biggest beneficiaries of that discontent? The Peking Fifth Column in this country. Therefore, I can conceive of no more scientific, no more thorough method of playing Peking's game to perfection than to enter into this mad competition with them in making the bomb.

It is not only the cost and logistics that are coming in the way. Our psychology also comes in the way. To exercise deterrence the enemy must know that you are prepared to drop the bomb first. Can any one believe that, led by our present pacific Prime Minister, or anyone else who is likely to replace him, any Government in this country is going to drop the atomic bomb first before they drop their bomb on us? The Chinese communists are men of that kind. We are not. This is always the advantage that the wicked have over the good. Therefore, even if we had the bomb, they would know that we would not strike first. Therefore, the whole idea of deterrence would be defeated by our very pacific and decent instincts. At the very least, we would have to develop a ten-to-one superiority over the Chinese to be able to strike terror into their hearts, to put the fear of God into Mao Tse-tung—something not economically or politically or psychologically within our reach. We simply cannot do it.

Principle of Interdependence

Therefore, if I may say so, with all respect, the case against our making the bomb is not a moral or semi-moral one. The case is a practical one of basic national interest, of what is good for this country, for its very survival.

This brings me to the third choice. The third choice is to accept the principle of interdependence, to admit that we are living in a world where none of us can stand entirely on our own, that "no man is an island", as John Donne has said, "no man is the Main". We are living in "One World." We talk of One World. When statesmen send message of greetings, they give expression to that very laudable objective. How about moulding our policies in that direction instead of making platonic statements? That is why I urge that as the only answer to the Chinese bomb we accept the principle of interdependence in nuclear affairs.

Today there are two major nuclear powers who can exercise that deterrent on our behalf—the United States and the Soviet Union. Let us certainly invite both of them to enter into an agreement with us, separately or jointly, to guarantee to protect us from nuclear attack in case such an attack is made against us. Let us do so, if we like not by ourselves; let us do it with other free countries of Asia, like Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Japan. Let us tell these powers: "We want you to let the world know that if anyone threatens to drop the bomb in any of these countries, you will see to it that it is prevented from doing so by first strike."

If both of them agree, let us welcome it.

I myself confess that I do not think that the Soviet Union would agree to it. Even Mr. Khrushchev would have turned down such a suggestion. Mr. Harriman has disclosed that some time ago he had put forward before Mr. Khrushchev the idea that the United States and the USSR should form a nuclear bloc against Communist China, but that this was very coldly turned down by Mr. Khrushchev. Today, with the new Government trying hard to make friends with Peking, we may be sure of not getting a very positive answer.

Still I think it would be right to ask both these powers to give us this assurance. If one of them turns it down and the other gives it, we should go ahead and accept that protection.

Today, if there is any one deterrent available, certainly it is the deterrent of the United States, a deterrent that has in fact, whether we like it or not, protected our sovereignty and the sovereignty of the other free countries of Asia and Europe during the last twenty years since the Second World War. If it were not for that deterrent, Stalin would have overrun the whole of Europe and Mao Tse-tung the whole of Asia.

In this context, the Prime Minister has been quoted as saying in Guntur in reference to the suggestion that I am now making that "we must maintain our independence and sovereignty", the implication being that if we accept the guarantee of a nuclear deterrent on our behalf, we would in some subtle way be mortgaging our independence and sovereignty. I entirely agree with him that nothing should be done that may mortgage our sovereignty or independence. But I say that today no country can guarantee its sovereignty and independence unless it has the good sense to pool its security and independence in collective security with the other free countries of the world. We are living in a world where independence of the old type is outmoded and has no reality.

The British Labour Party has decided to scrap its own nuclear deterrent which the Conservatives had installed. They propose to negotiate again for the American deterrent, the American umbrella, to cover the United Kingdom. Does this mean that Mr. Harold Wilson is going to surrender the independence and sovereignty of Britain to America? How does Mr. Harold Wilson, by no means pro-American—if there is any politician in the Labour Party who is anti-American, he is the one—reconcile the maintenance of his country's sovereignty and freedom from America?

The new Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Sato, on November 11, made a policy statement. He said two things: Japan will not make the bomb, but Japan will accept U.S. nuclear-provided submarines in Japanese ports under the Japan-U.S. mutual security treaty. Does this mean that he is going to sell out the independence of Japan?

I hope, therefore, that this line of thought will not be pursued any more. There is no connection between giving up our independence and security and accepting the deterrent. It is the other way. If we do not accept the nuclear deterrent, we are in fact exposing ourselves to a situation where gradually our security and independence will be eroded, whether we want it or not.

U.S. Offer

Some people have said: "Why ask for an American assurance openly? Do we not already have it? Let us be Machiavellian! Let us pretend that we shall not ask for it but we know and they know that they will always come to our rescue!" They ask: "Has not President Johnson said so? Let us carefully read President Johnson's very interesting and encouraging statement of October 18, 1964. President Johnson said: 'Nations that do not seek nuclear weapons can be sure that, if they need U.S. support against the threat of nuclear blackmail, they will have it.' Mark the words. There is an 'if'. It is an invitation to anyone who feels like it to go and say so, to get up and say: 'Yes, I want your support because I am exposed to nuclear black-

mail." In that event, President Johnson says that the United States is pledged to guarantee freedom from nuclear attack by giving the protection of their own superior nuclear force.

To rely on that offer but read in it something more than there is would be misleading and unfair, both to ourselves and to the person who made the offer. It is not enough if we shout after being attacked. "Please come and help us," as we did the last time, and ask the United States to drop the bomb on Peking because, as we agreed earlier, what we want is to deter an attack and not to retaliate.

On whose mind must a deterrent work? We may know that the Americans will come to help us. Let us say that we privately settle that with them. But that is not good enough. It is the mind of the person who is to be deterred that counts. It is the man in Peking with his finger on the trigger who must know that, before his bomb can drop on us, he will be destroyed. That can only be done by a public agreement. There is no other way to do it. Hence, the absolute necessity for the survival and protection of Northern India is an open Mutual Security arrangement entered into with the United States and, if possible, with the Soviet Government.

Non-alignment

Finally, it is said: "Would not this be contrary to our non-alignment?"

I and people who think like me do not accept non-alignment. We have said since 1960, two years before the Chinese military attack, that non-alignment has lost all meaning. But let us leave that alone. Let us for the moment all agree that we do not want to abandon non-alignment as a policy. I say that even those who hold non-alignment dear, should have no difficulty at all in inviting a nuclear deterrent for the protection of our people against a nuclear attack. Non-alignment, when first worked out, meant that we had to be neutral between Russia and America and the two groups. What relevance has that concept got when we are in the line of fire, when we are attacked? If non-alignment meant not to ask for help from other countries, then Pandit Nehru, our late Prime Minister, betrayed non-alignment in October 1962. No. He did not abandon non-alignment. What he did was merely patriotic and consistent with non-alignment. He made an appeal to all the free countries of the world to come to our assistance and he said that this was consistent with non-alignment. I would therefore assert that if anyone today argues that to ask for the nuclear deterrent would be to abandon non-alignment, he would be condemning Pandit Nehru. Therefore let us abide by the view of the man who invented non-alignment for us, such as it was.

To conclude, therefore, I think, this country needs to turn away from the barren path that has led us to the isolation and humiliation in which we find ourselves in, where neither Zanzibar nor Burma or Ceylon shows the slightest respect for us or what we want. We have to learn to recognise and distinguish between friends and enemies. We have to learn to link arms with our friends. We have to learn to follow a good-neighbour policy with our immediate neighbours without appeasing or surrendering anything. We have to learn to be self-reliant in regard to conventional weapons and to be good world citizens in regard to the nuclear deterrent.